

## **Y-Town, Pavlik & A New Beginning**

**By**

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### **Part I: Background: The State of American Boxing & Society**

Boxing, especially in America, has been in decline, and it's been in decline for a long time.

Contemporary boxing junkies don't like to hear that. They point out that 2007 was the most successful year in boxing history relative to the total amount of PPV buys.

They're right about that, however, the reality of the situation is deeper.

2007 was a very good year. Marquez – Vasquez I & II, all three of Kelly Pavlik's wars, and both of Miguel Cotto's fights, which showcased his fascinating combination of cool élan, ebb and flow warfare, and occasional artistic brutality, were huge pluses for the year.

Couple all of that with Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s pristine skill set and controversial persona, HBO's absolutely superb planning, implementation, and execution of their "Countdown" and "24/7" marketing campaigns, and the sport made a nice comeback for the year.

Nonetheless, the truth about 2007 is evident. Not all network executives, promoters, managers, and other power brokers in the sport are blind, corrupt, narcissistic fools completely addicted to profit without value or honor. To their credit, they realized that the sport was in horrible shape, their dysfunctional monopoly was finally on the edge of the cliff, MMA had become an increasingly ominous competitor, and the sport was poised to fall deeper and deeper into oblivion.

They had to do something, and they had to do it fast.

They did.

The real question is, can it continue?

I hope it does, and I'm not completely pessimistic that 2007 was either an aberration or a temporary band-aide attempting to cover up a terminal ailment. Unfortunately, however, as I will explain below, the deck is structurally stacked against progression and evolution.

Allow me to explain why.

## ***Deindustrialized America – Consumption Instead of Production***

*“I think Rome’s on fire and we don’t see it. Sometimes it seems that everybody coming out of school wants to go to Wall Street or be a lawyer. Everybody in this country is a service individual. We’re a nation of ambulance chasers! How can you fix something if you don’t know it’s broke?”*

---Keith Earl Busse, 1987

*(Author’s Note: Busse, the son of a Fort Wayne, Indiana fireman, graduated from small, nondescript St. Francis College in the early 1970s at the age of 29. After spending several years as one of the key players in the rise of one of the greatest industrial success stories in American history, Nucor Corporation, Busse started his own company, Steel Dynamics, in his hometown in 1993. Now in only its 15<sup>th</sup> year in business, Steel Dynamics is a \$4 billion company. Busse’s non-unionized, team-oriented steelworkers can earn \$100,000 during a good year. Steel Dynamics has never outsourced the job of an American steelworker to a foreign country. Busse is one of too few astute American businessmen to consistently thrive in a declining market without exploiting the tax code. His personal fortune is estimated at over \$50 million.)*

In addition to the accepted notions of decades of mismanagement by promoters, network executives, and the sanctioning bodies, the decline of boxing can also be attributed to a confluence of daunting factors, with a massive functional catalyst being the onset of deindustrialization in the mid-to-late 1970s.

In my opinion, boxing peaked long ago. In 2005, I wrote an article for a now defunct New York-based online publication titled, “Carlos Maussa and The Paradigm Shift.” In the article, I opined that American boxing actually peaked in the middle of the twentieth century, and was traceable to the immigration and gradual assimilation of various ethnic groups into the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

As with any sport or science, boxing evolved over the first several decades of the twentieth century. In looking at the unique history of the sport, the real, true peak of boxing actually occurred during the age of Tom Brokaw’s “Greatest Generation”, the 1940s and 1950s.

That particular era was special as it applies to both the depth and breadth of talent, and the science, craft, and technique of boxing. Most of the top fighters from that time were first and second generation immigrants from Europe. Their parents toiled and produced goods in the manufacturing plants of America, and they forged their boxing apprenticeships and careers during the peak of the industrial revolution.

Tony Zale, Rocky Graziano, Jake LaMotta, Fritz Zivic, Carmen Basilio, and Billy Conn were some of the great white ethnic fighters to occupy the U.S. boxing landscape during that era.

African-American boxers, most of whom originally came from the poor, agrarian, rural South, migrated with their families to the manufacturing belt during this time as well.

Some of the greatest boxers of this era, and in boxing history, like Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, and Ezzard Charles, were born in the South. All three men migrated to the industrial powerhouse regions of the Midwest as children with their families.

Louis and Charles are permanent cultural icons of Detroit and Cincinnati, respectively, and Louis remains a national hero over a quarter century after his death.

Sugar Ray Robinson was born in Georgia, and his family moved to Detroit in search of opportunity when he was a child. Robinson arguably became the greatest fighter in boxing history thereafter once he moved to the thriving, traditional boxing hot bed of New York City.

The trend continued for several more decades as industrial America continued to produce American-made goods while producing boxing's greatest champions as well.

Another example of this lies deep inside the great boxing tradition of Philadelphia. During WWII, the greatest symbols of Philadelphia boxing culture, Joe Frazier and Bennie Briscoe, were actually born in the South.

Frazier was born in the poorest county in the United States at the time, Beaufort, South Carolina. He initially moved to New York City in his late teens, and then settled in the City of Brotherly Love in the early 1960s. Briscoe was born and raised in then rural Augusta, Georgia, and moved to Philly as a kid as well.

Both Frazier and Briscoe arrived in Philadelphia as overweight teenagers. They both lost approximately 40 pounds in the Philadelphia gyms to get in shape. They began their professional boxing careers in the 1960s, and became permanently etched in the consciousness of Philadelphia culture, and boxing history, in the 1970s.

Boxing remained ingrained in the culture of the United States of industrial America for a period of time thereafter, but unfortunately, a gradual, insidious decline occurred, which is still being felt today.

Since the onset of deindustrialization in the 1970s, the massive deterioration of our American manufacturing base eviscerated the inner cities of several old time, smokestack boxing cities, which had produced decade after decade of American boxing legends.

In a spectacular and unprecedented collapse, from 1977-1987, the American steel industry lost 50 million tons of capacity and thousands of jobs. 25% of American steel companies, mostly those with thick layers of bureaucracy and constantly at war for decades with their unionized workforces, were challenged by foreign imports, and went into bankruptcy. The ripple effect extended throughout America, with suppliers and other parts of heavy industry going into an overwhelming spiral of decline. In many industrial cities, unemployment hovered between 13% and 25%.

In 1975, the American steel industry employed an estimated 550,000 steelworkers, Today, the number reportedly totals less than 100,000.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, while the automobile industry was failing and jettisoning thousands of workers, the U.S. government saved Chrysler Corporation from bankruptcy with guaranteed loans. Lee Iacocca became a symbol of American ingenuity and success during this time, but the truth about Chrysler and Iacocca is different than the media portrayed.

Anthony J.F. O'Reilly, the former Chairman & CEO of Heinz, is currently the richest man in Ireland. When he took over the helm at Heinz in 1979, Heinz was worth \$800 million. When he departed as CEO 20 years later, Heinz was worth \$13 billion, with less shares in issue.

In an early 1990 interview, O'Reilly, who was one of Ireland's greatest rugby players in the 1950s, holds a law degree and a Ph.D. in agricultural marketing, and ran several other international businesses while he was in charge of the Heinz empire, exposed the myth of Iacocca and Chrysler. As we know, Chrysler, and the American automobile industry, ultimately went into a steep, frightening decline in the late 1980s, and have never really been the same.

"Lee Iacocca is a classic example. Seven years ago he was voted the best CEO in the country. He got three quarters of the selection committee's votes. This year he got none. Now, does that mean he was better seven years ago than now? No. What happened seven years ago was that a trigger mechanism and voluntary quotas were put on the import of Japanese cars. So he was the beneficiary of protectionism. But now that's gone, his costs have gone against him and.....well, he looks like a real clown."

Many industrial cities have suffered since then, many of which produced generations of great boxing talent.

As an example, Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Cincinnati, all producers of a tremendous amount of boxing talent throughout boxing history, were some of the most notable casualties of deindustrialization.

The below table shows the population declines in each city from 1970 to the most recent census figures in 2006, including the % of people lost.

Cities	Detroit	Philadelphia	Cleveland	Cincinnati
1970	1,514,063	1,948,609	750,903	452,524
1980	1,203,368	1,688,210	573,822	385,457
1990	1,027,974	1,585,577	505,616	364,040
2000	951,270	1,517,550	478,403	331,285
2006	918,849	1,448,394	414,602	332,252
<b>Net Loss</b>	<b>-595,214</b>	<b>-500,215</b>	<b>-336,301</b>	<b>-120,272</b>
<b>% Loss</b>	<b>39.4%</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>44.8%</b>	<b>26.6%</b>

\*Source – U.S. Bureau of Census

In total, the four cities, all of which produced tremendous boxing talent in previous decades, **lost 1,552,002 people in slightly over 3 ½ decades.**

In looking at the above table, Detroit is particularly notable because until recently, it was the long-time home of the famous Kronk Gym in south Detroit. Why hasn't Emanuel Steward developed homegrown talent out of Detroit in a long time? Part of the answer lies in the numbers above.

Interestingly, today most of the metropolitan areas of those old school boxing cities are actually larger than they were decades ago, but dominated by suburban sprawl. Boxing is not, nor will it ever be, a suburban sport. Thus, the supply of inner city and blue-collar fighters has decreased.

The trend will likely continue as good, old fashioned physical labor and manufacturing jobs continue to disappear from the inner city and former blue collar enclaves in line with increased economic fragmentation from those once proud cities.

In blunt terms, supply and demand dictate markets, and supply of fighters in America is simply less than in the past.

Two other major boxing cities, New York City and Chicago, are exceptions to the rule. NYC has actually experienced an approximate population gain of 8% since 1970, and Chicago has experienced a population loss of 16%. Like the other cities noted above, both of the metropolitan areas are disproportionately larger than they were in the 1970s.

Regardless of population growth in NYC, boxing in the Big Apple declined tremendously during the last several decades. Needless to say, going into the details of the decline of boxing in NYC is tantamount to producing a series of books. For the purpose of brevity, the best thing I can say is that over the years many famous gyms disappeared for different reasons, NYC became a very difficult place to do business for many reasons as well, and I'll leave it at that. Promoters like Lou DiBella have tried to help buoy the situation with his "Broadway Boxing" series, but boxing in NYC is just different than in years past.

Population loss in Chicago has occurred as in the other Rust Belt cities noted above, but at a less devastating rate. Today, Chicago is not as strong a boxing city as it was years ago, but it is much stronger than most of those cities.

What makes Chicago unique is that it has many hard working promoters are pushing the sport against difficult odds, and Chicago possesses a rich, massively diverse population base.

It is well known that promoters, most notably Golden Boy Promotions and Bob Arum, have arduously pursued the Hispanic market during this decade. It is no mistake that part of Chicago's boxing leverage hinges on the fact that it ranks second behind Los Angeles with the largest Hispanic population of any major city in the United States.

As America has been transformed from an inner city, industrial, production-based society to a suburban, service sector and information-based consumer society, the sport of boxing has declined as well.

### **The Decline of the Middle Class Boxer**

*" From what I've seen, and what I've been used to, and seeing how it's worked over the years, it's like any business. The people aren't around that care about it, and aren't pushing it. My last year fighting as an amateur was in 1962. At the Cincinnati Garden, there were 10,000 people in the house. That's a lot of people."*

---Legendary Cincinnati boxing trainer, Billy Joiner, 2005

Adjusted for inflation, the average American middle class worker makes less than they did 30 years ago. It goes without saying that a society is only strong as its middle class. Americans are being squeezed from diverse and often unexpected angles.

This change has also been reflective in the sport of boxing. Since the late 1970s, the sport of boxing changed from a traditional sport showcasing talent in the hometowns of many boxers to more of a sport about greed and money.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, promoters began moving fights to the casinos in Las Vegas and Atlantic City. Promoters also used television as a crutch so they didn't have to push ticket sales in the hometowns of fighters. Furthermore, promoters developed complex relationships with networks, and managers and matchmakers have found it harder and harder to make a living in the sport.

Moreover, the advent of pay networks siphoned off a lot of fights from free television, and the fan base for the sport began to move to other sports. As a result, middle class and club fighters began to disappear more and more. “Smokers” decreased, and regional promoters had a tougher time competing against the big promoters. ESPN, which in some ways functioned as a deep, organized farm league for boxing for a long time, began to pay fighters less and less. The USA Network’s “Tuesday Night” fights was canceled in the 1990s. Fox Sports has tried to pick up some of the slack in this decade, but in truth, it has never really taken off.

If you’re not at the top of the heap in boxing, you struggle like never before.

Legendary independent NYC-based matchmaker, Johnny Bos, further explained the myriad factors in the decline of the middle class boxer in an interview with award winning NYC-based writer, Zachary Levin on the [www.thesweetscience.com](http://www.thesweetscience.com) a few years ago.

“Crooks don’t run boxing now, white-collar crooks do. They don’t know nothin’ about it, and they have made it worse for fighters. Used to be the money was better, more spread out. Now only a certain few make it.”

Bos went on to further clarify the decline of the middle class fighter in his interview with Levin.

“.....in the 1950s they earned \$3,500 to \$7,500 on fights of the week (the ‘Pabst Blue Ribbon Bouts’ on Wednesday’s or the ‘Gillette Friday Night Fights,’ for instance).

Levin noted in the article that main events on ESPN2’s Friday Night Fights now only garner purses of \$10,000 to \$15,000.

Bos put this in further perspective.

“\$3,500 then would be like \$35,000 today, right? A fighter could make a livin’ in those days. Nowadays a fighter can’t.”

On Monday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, I spoke to Johnny Bos on the phone for over four hours. Despite well-documented health and financial woes, Bos is generous beyond comprehension. A true man of his word with an incredible depth of knowledge, I was stunned by Johnny’s humor and vigor as we discussed a variety of topics about the sport.

In sum, his views on the sport still reflect those that you see in the above quotes from Levin’s superb interview. What is symbolic about Johnny Bos is that he represents the good of the sport, but he also represents a lot of the change in the sport. As an independent matchmaker---the quintessential “middle man” and a symbol of the middle class in boxing----it is extremely hard for Johnny to find consistent, decent paying work in the sport.

All told, as the middle class declines, in both society and boxing, the divide between rich and poor increases, and chaos and decline ultimately ensues.

## Birth Rates & Generational Shift

*“Western civilization seems to have forgotten what every primitive society understands, you need kids to have a healthy society. Children are huge consumers. Then they grow up to become taxpayers. That's how a society works, but the post-modern secular state seems to have forgotten that. If U.S. birth rates of the past 20 to 30 years had been the same as post-World War II, there would be no Social Security or Medicare problem.”*

---Herbert Meyer, 2007

*(Author's Note: Meyer is the former Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence & former Vice Chairman of the CIA's National Intelligence Council during the Reagan Administration. Meyer is widely credited with being the first senior U.S. Government official to forecast the collapse of the Soviet Union, for which he later was awarded the U.S. National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal, the intelligence community's highest honor.)*

Another item to consider relative to the decline of boxing is declining birth rates by demographic groups. The aging of the Baby Boom population, which is on the verge of causing a serious litany of social problems in the United States, is a demographic group consisting of those born just after WWII until the early part of the 1960s. An estimated 85 million people were born during that time frame.

The Baby Boom Generation, which included some of the greatest fighters in history including Larry Holmes, George Foreman, Michael Spinks, Marvin Hagler, Sugar Ray Leonard, and Aaron Pryor, aged out of the boxing landscape long ago. The Baby Boom generation represents the greatest birth rate explosion in U.S. history, and the potential for growth from that demographic group in boxing is now nonexistent.

The next American demographic group, Generation X, is a group consisting of those born after the Baby Boom in the early-to-mid 1960s until the late 1970s and early 1980s. During that time, a massive decrease in U.S. birth rates occurred. An estimated 50 million people were born during that time. The decrease in births compared to the Baby Boom Generation, a net reduction of approximately **35 million people**, is astonishing.

Since that time, however, American birth rates have increased, but haven't made up the huge decrease in births from the previous demographic. The newest demographic group, Generation Y, accounted for an estimated 70 million births between the early 1980s and the late 1990s.

Most importantly, society, as we know, has changed tremendously over the years in accordance with the cultural shifts attributable to both Generation X and Generation Y.



Generation X is often noted in popular culture with negative connotations. Nihilism, cynicism, grunge rock, apathy, misanthropy, and alienation are the hallmarks of this culture. The life and death of Nirvana's Kurt Cobain was a major symbol of Generation X angst.

Generation Y, the children of the Baby Boomers, are a technically astute group who put a heavy emphasis on self-fulfillment, expect rapid advancement in the workplace, and don't expect to remain in one career for extended periods of time. They are perhaps the most independent-minded demographic group in American history. This group constitutes the antithesis and rejection of the institutions and cultural ethos of traditional white picket fence America.

In kind, for boxing, both of these demographic groups don't seem to fit very well into the boxing landscape. It is the newer, poorer, hungrier fighters from abroad, namely Latin fighters and eastern European and Ex-Soviet Bloc fighters from tougher, poorer societies, who appear to be on the verge of dominating the sport for decades to come.

As a corollary to this analysis, I asked myself the following question. While taking into account the 1980 boycott of the Moscow Olympic Games, how many Olympic Gold Medalists has the United States produced from 1976 until 2004?

The below table shows a remarkable trend. 19 members of the United States Olympic Team have won gold medals since the 1976 Olympics. 16, or 84%, of those medals were won during the three Olympic games between 1976 and 1988.

Olympic Years	U.S. Gold Medals
1976	5
1984*	9
1988	2
1992	1
1996	1
2000	0
2004	1

(\* Author's Note: In 1984, the Soviet Union & Cuba chose to boycott the Los Angeles Olympic Games. In my opinion, it is likely that the Soviet Union and Cuba would've won 3 or 4 gold medals in Los Angeles.)

Needless to say, the world has changed.

## **PRISON : THE HIDDEN FACTOR**

*"The state of California has opened only one college since 1984 -- and twenty-one prisons."*

---From award winning criminologist Elliott Currie's 1998 book, *Crime and Punishment in America*.

*“He’s (Carlos Monzon) got a big file, about 40 arrests. It’s not true when they say the best fighters come from ghettos. The best ones come from jail. But that is good. If they didn’t lock up those animals, the streets wouldn’t be safe for us.”*

----Carlos Monzon’s Hall of Fame promoter, Rodolfo Sabatini, August 1977

Over the last few decades, many have opined that American boxing talent has been lost to sports like football, basketball, the professionalization of track and field, and other sports. A more ominous and substantive factor is *the explosion of U.S. incarceration rates over the last 25-30 years.*

That is, our boxing talent certainly could be on football, baseball, basketball, and track fields, but unquestionably, it also resides in the depths of our massively growing state and federal prison systems. Boxing is a violent sport, and throughout history, perhaps more than any other sport, boxing and the criminal justice seem to go hand in hand in various ways.

Floyd Patterson, Archie Moore, and George Foreman were all juvenile delinquents, and boxing saved all of them from a future of incarceration. Unfortunately, society is much different today than it was during their formative years, and the likelihood of young men emerging from delinquency to become famous boxers is simply less than in the past.

In 1975, criminologist Robert Martinson published his famous study titled, *The Effectiveness of Correctional Treatment: A Survey of Treatment Evaluation Studies*. The basic premise of the study was that no method of “treatment” or rehabilitation for offenders was proven to be effective. Shortly thereafter, this famous study forebodingly became known as “Nothing Works.”

Many politicians and leaders during that time used that study to implement “get tough” policies on offenders, to clean up their cities, satisfy the public outcry, and begin the process of “warehousing” instead of “treating” offenders.

In the 1980s, President Reagan took this concept and ran with it. The Reagan Administration targeted both organized and street criminals alike, and did some good things to get dangerous, chronic offenders off the street, and set the tone for breaking the backs of many infamous organized crime networks.

Unfortunately, however, a heavier and less effective emphasis was actually put on going after common, lower level drug offenders, a group that began serving longer, indeterminate sentences.

“Lock ‘em up & throw away the key” became a catch phrase during that time.

As a byproduct of this, prison overcrowding and violence increased, prison gangs, mostly separated by race, became more organized and powerful within prison walls, and ran increasingly profitable organized crime networks, mostly fueled by drug trade profits, with tentacles reaching to recruits on the outside.

To add fuel to the fire, Reagan emptied and closed mental hospitals across the United States in the mid-1980s. As a result, homelessness of the mentally ill increased, and yes, you guessed it, many psychotic and dangerously ill mental patients ended up being warehoused in our nation's prisons.

In 1985, criminologist Henry Pontell's great, prophetic book, *A Capacity To Punish*, called into question the potentially devastating ramifications of mass incarceration. Simply put, you can only take it so far until the system breaks, and it did.

During the 1980s, we also witnessed a gradual, but huge, complex shift in our inner cities, a time when the "underclass" became a new group in our society. The "underclass" faced a vicious combination of declining inner city tax bases, eroding educational systems, massive reduction in decent paying manufacturing jobs replaced by low paying service work with fewer fringe benefits, and the continued disintegration of traditional, nuclear families to fall back on in tough times.

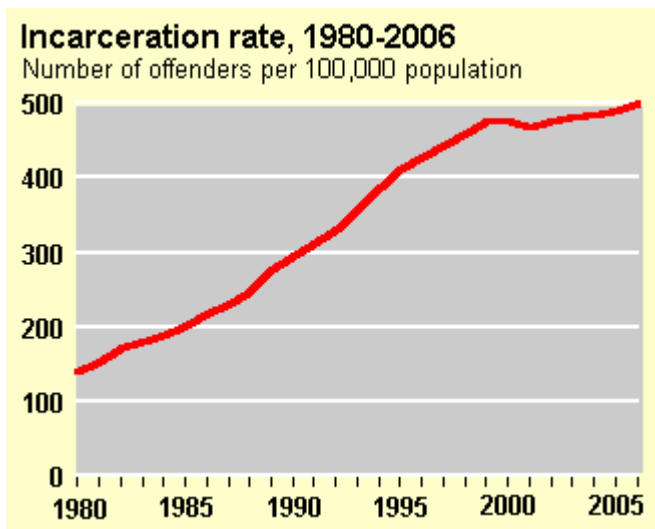
Not surprisingly, freebase and crack cocaine became lucrative markets as America became more fragmented in the 1980s, and the division between rich and poor grew in accordance with "trickle down" economics. Thousands upon thousands of inner city males were drawn to the quick fix results of selling thousands of dollars worth of cocaine in stunningly short periods of time. Organized gang membership in inner cities mushroomed. Armed with automatic weapons, thousands of gang members died in the warfare for profit, and many innocent bystanders were killed in daily drive-by shootings across America.

Our inner cities have never been the same.

To contrast the deindustrialized 1980s with industrial America during the 1950s and 1960s, heroin, not cocaine, was king in the inner cities during those decades. Heroin extracted a massive toll on our inner cities in the 1950s and 1960s, but the fallout was less devastating because the foundation of our inner cities was stronger in the 1950s and 1960s compared to the 1980s.

The structural shift of the 1980s resulted in a generation of inner males relegated to the bowels of American society.

As a result of changes beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and accelerated by California's 1994 controversial enactment of the "Three Strikes" law, the United States now leads the world in the amount of offenders incarcerated as a % of population. The below graph shows the massive increase in incarceration rates since 1980.



A more stunning statistical profile is the racial make-up by % of the prison population.

According the Bureau of Justice Statistics, by year end 2006 there were:

- 3,042 African-American male sentenced prisoners per 100,000 black males in the United States.
- 1,261 Hispanic males sentenced prisoners per 100,000 Hispanic males in the United States.
- 487 Caucasian male sentenced prisoners per 100,000 Caucasian males in the United States.

Not long ago, Teddy Atlas and Bernard Hopkins appeared together on ESPN and pledged to discuss, organize, structure, and implement boxing programs in U.S. prisons. Atlas is an alumnus of Riker's Island. Hopkins is an alumnus of Graterford. Both seem perfectly suited for the task, but it's not that simple.

Many boxing programs already exist throughout America, and have existed for decades, but realistically, they must be run in a highly regimented manner with complete support from highest levels of the state and federal prison systems. Due to the change from rehabilitation to warehousing of criminals over the last few decades, the hope for developing real boxing talent in prisons is actually greatly diminished.

As we know, Bernard Hopkins is the exception to this rule. He would probably agree with Martinson's study, which was published when he was beginning his career as a juvenile delinquent in North Philadelphia. He, like many others, would likely proclaim that rehabilitation is mostly a choice. He made a choice, even though the odds were against him.

Very few actually do.

Former welterweight contender, Pete Ranzany, has been a prison guard at one of California's toughest prisons, Folsom, since the late 1980s. He actually ran a boxing program at Folsom for a while, but abandoned it.

In a superb interview with writer Robert Mladnich in 2005 on [www.thesweetscience.com](http://www.thesweetscience.com), here is what Ranzany said about his experience with the boxing program at Folsom.

"Most of them didn't like the discipline," he explained. "[When] I made them spar once a week, I went from 50 fighters to 16 overnight. In the movies, inmates are usually really tough. But after working with the team for a year, I bet my sister could have beaten many of the fighters if they didn't have a knife or a gun."

We've simply lost too many people for too long a time in too many ways.

The sentiments of Atlas and Hopkins are admirable. A well organized, properly run boxing program could be helpful in some circumstances in the right prisons with the right people running the show. However, the fact of the matter is that utilizing our prisons as a feeder system for the professional ranks isn't feasible. Whereas as young man might serve a 3 or 4 year prison stint 30 years ago, he might serve 3 to 4 times that amount today, and get lost in the culture and structure of prison gangs in the process, while repeating the cycle until death. Prison conditions, prison culture, and American society is much different now than when Hopkins was initially incarcerated as a 17-year-old in the 1982.

## **The Future**

*"In the global village, we can't do it alone. We need to find world-class partners. We need the best --- the best architect the best supplier, the best consultant --- rather than the closest. This is already happening. The intermediary products that make up Ford Escort's model come from 15 countries."*

----From the 2000 business book, *Funky Business: Talent Makes Capital Dance*, by Swedish management consultants Jonas Ridderstrale and Kjell Nordstrom. *Funky Business* has been translated into 31 languages, has been featured in *Fortune* and *Time Magazine*, and is ranked among the top 20 best business book of all-time.

All in all, boxing will not die in the United States. It's just a matter of managing decline. To be sure, I'm not blind to the fact that I could be completely wrong. We live in a fluid, chaotic world where traditional institutions and accepted truths are becoming increasingly irrelevant. To put it another way, regardless of statistical relevance, unexpected events or inflection points can occur on a whim and change the course of history in one fell swoop.

What then, lies ahead for American boxing?

The answer to this question is somewhat simple, and mirrors a lot of what is currently going on in American society.

Due to these various twists and turns, the future of boxing will increasingly come from abroad. It's akin to American companies increasing outsourcing to foreign countries like China, and

American software makers continuing to recruit foreign talent from India and other countries with superior educational systems.

Let's be realistic, foreign countries are producing more amateur champions than ever before. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, foreign amateur champions have migrated in increasing numbers to the United States over the last two decades.

With the shrinking pool of American boxing talent and gyms, foreign boxers are seeking out and securing the best American trainers to round out their styles for the professional ranks. Couple this fact that many other foreign boxers, most notably Manny Pacquiao, Joe Calzaghe, and Ricky Hatton, garner more rabid fan followings than most of their American counterparts, and you have the underpinnings of a major league power shift.

The elephant had been shot years ago, and is on the precipice of toppling over, but hopefully not permanently.

In looking at the American boxing landscape now, very few American fighters can currently provide the remnants of the pure craft of the Greatest Generation, the Baby Boom Generation, or early Generation X fighters like Toney and Hopkins.

We still have Floyd Mayweather, Jr., the best fighter in the world. He is a child of middle part of the Generation X demographic, and has been the successor in pure craft to Toney and Hopkins in that regard. Unfortunately, his level of individualism is much more extreme compared to his esteemed predecessors.

Despite his tremendous accomplishments, Floyd is also different than the fellow belt holders in his division. He is more about separation, both in the business of boxing and in other ways, than integration. Miguel Cotto, Kermit Cintron, and newly crowned Carlos Quintana all have one thing in common: ***They want to liberate and unify the toughest division in boxing.***

In an example of all that is wrong with boxing, Floyd Mayweather is now aiming towards an intrinsically meaningless rematch with boxing's fastest rising promoter, Oscar De La Hoya.

Greed is not good.

On a different note, we also need to understand something about the nature of boxing. Bluntly stated, the poor fight. In kind, the poor must have the resources to move forward, and in boxing, the epicenter of boxing gyms, mass immigration, and structural social inequality is most evident in my former hometown, Los Angeles.

Boxing, despite its many woes, brings opportunity to many, and Los Angeles is currently a symbol of opportunity for many boxers looking for the best gyms, trainers, and sparring in the country.

It should then come as no surprise to many that Emanuel Steward, one of the wisest and shrewdest operators in the sport, recently announced that he's looking for a gym in the Los Angeles

metropolitan area. The Kronk assembly line faded a long time ago in accordance with permanent changes in our society. Steward, who has experimented with different training locales over the last 15+ years, is now looking to set up shop in the Sun Belt instead of the Rust Belt.

For millions of people in our country, the Sun Belt---whether it be migration from the Eastern Seaboard and Rust Belt to Florida, or on the other side of the country to California, Nevada, and Arizona---is now the choice for many looking for opportunity in our country.

Many jobs have also moved to the Old South. In 2009, the state of Alabama is on track to produce more cars than Detroit.

Jobs and people have been moving out of the traditional smokestack regions for decades, just as American boxers have, but the opportunities are essentially more limited and less stable than they were 30-50 years ago.

Amidst the dizzying rate of change in the last few decades, hope still exists against the odds, both for American society and American boxing. In a world where chaos theory seems to apply more than assembly line predictability, and continues to challenge the basic assumptions and foundations of Western civilization, basic, intrinsic justice still prevails. In boxing, it came out of nowhere in 2007 in the form of an anomalous symbol of hope; a symbol of hope who just happens to be a child of the Rust Belt, as well as a child of Generation Y.

Youngstown's Kelly "The Ghost" Pavlik.

"The Ghost", as I'll demonstrate in Part II of this article, has broken all of the rules of his contemporary profession. He's done everything in reverse. He is also actually a very complex and contradictory symbol of hope, not only for his hometown in the deep, post-industrial abyss of Youngstown, but a symbol of hope for the future of boxing as well.